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ABSTRACT

Practical suggestions for telephone procedures and courtesy and for helping staff to provide prompt, accurate information to callers are offered in this pamphlet. The suggestions, developed by classified staff of Jefferson Community College (Kentucky) through a small-group process, are divided into four categories: (1) general responsibilities for the institution and all staff members (four suggestions); (2) switchboard responsibilities for full-time and temporary operators (nine suggestions); (3) department/division responsibilities for unit heads and secretaries (19 suggestions); and (4) faculty and administrative staff responsibilities (nine suggestions). (DC)

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JEFFERSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE ...MAY I HELP YOU ?

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JEFFERSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE...MAY I HELP YOU?

The classified staff members of Jefferson Community College are proud to present the fourth in a series of practical guides to improve the academic and communication climate at an institution of higher education. The first three pamphlets were the products of the mini-group process which generated ideas on successful teaching practices, increasing library use, and working with minority students:

1. Full Classrooms: 95 Practical Suggestions to Guarantee Student and Teacher Success
2. Used Books: 54 Suggestions to Increase Library Use
3. Black Students -- Special Problems/Special Needs for Retention.

This fourth pamphlet, Jefferson Community College...May I Help You? is the product of twenty-one members of the classified staff who met in small groups (i.e., mini-think tanks) to pinpoint practical suggestions for telephone procedures and courtesy. This pamphlet is particularly important when one realizes that the telephone is the PRIMARY LINK with the general public and that classified staff are an essential part of that link. The suggestions contained in this pamphlet may be self-evident to the reader, but all of us need to be reminded of our communication responsibilities.

Through the direct contributions of the classified staff, we have again demonstrated that we (faculty and staff) are our own best resource in creating a positive working and learning enviornment.

Ronald J. Horvath
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I. GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES

This area focuses on responsibilities associated primarily with the institution and all staff members.

1. Keep all telephones in working order. Inform units of the college if their phones are inoperable.
2. Keep the switchboard informed of all important events, locations, and functions involving your unit (workshops, seminars, student activities).
3. Instruct new employees and student workers on telephone use and courtesy.
4. Publish in the Telephone Directory the Campus Security number to be used during off hours.

II. SWITCHBOARD RESPONSIBILITIES

These suggestions are designed to help the operators (full-time as well as temporary substitutes) carry out their functions effectively and efficiently.

1. All calls must be answered promptly. An incoming call should not ring at the switchboard more than four times.
2. All calls should be answered in a pleasant, polite tone, using a cheerful voice and speaking distinctly.
3. Don't be condescending to a caller. No question is a dumb one!
4. Ask questions that will give you the information to help the caller: "Was this class advertised in the newspaper or did you find it in the class schedule?" or "Are you calling in regard to a business class or a business office matter?"
5. Put all campus events on a master calendar and keep the calendar handy.
6. Maintain an accurate list of Division and Unit Heads for instant reference.
7. Calls which require follow-up questions or information should be placed on hold if other calls are coming in. Tell the caller briefly that you are placing them on hold.
8. When ringing through to an office, do not let the office phone ring more than 6 times before picking up on the call and saying, "I'm sorry, ___ does not seem to be in his/her office. I'll ring the Division/Unit office. Someone there will take your message."
9. Never leave the switchboard unattended.

III. DEPARTMENT/DIVISION RESPONSIBILITIES

This area is an extremely important one primarily because most calls deal with academic matters. Thus, unit heads and secretaries have a great deal of responsibility in maintaining and building a "helping" image.

1. A Division/Department phone should not go unanswered. Work out a sharing arrangement with another unit if the office will be vacant.

2. Never be discourteous on the telephone. If the caller is nasty and/or profane, simply say, "Let me transfer you to my supervisor" OR "I'm sorry, I cannot continue this conversation if you insist on using that kind of language."

3. Each unit should be consistent in how telephones are answered. Examples: "Allied Health Division, Dorothy Poole," OR "Good Morning, Admissions Office, Mary Sandifer speaking."

4. Each unit should be consistent in the kinds of information given over the phone e.g., dates of registration, application deadlines, advisor schedules, etc.

5. Each unit should develop a procedure for telephone calls which report teacher or student absences.

6. If a person you are calling is not in and someone else answers the phone, at least give your name and indicate whether you will call back or ask the other person to call back.

7. Keep a note pad and pencil handy to record messages, time of call, caller's name, and phone number.

8. Train everyone including student workers in telephone courtesy and message-taking procedures.

9. Report all phone malfunctions immediately to the Business Office.

10. Keep a master schedule of all full and part-time teaching schedules close to the telephone.

11 Be aware of campus events and locations. Keep the information close at hand.

12. Remind the faculty often about programming and de-programming their telephones.

13. When a caller asks to speak to your supervisor, don't ask "Who's calling?" instead, ask, "May I say who is calling?"; or, if your supervisor is not available, ask: "May I tell him/her who called?" Naturally, offer to take a message.

14. Try to learn the names and voices of frequent callers and use their names when they call; this is good PR!

15. Never answer the phone with gum or food in your mouth.

16. Remember you are working in a business office; calls should be answered in a business-like manner, not with a flippant or silly voice.

17. If you must transfer a call to another office, inform the caller that you are doing so and give the new extension number to the caller in case you are cut off. You may need to explain the reason for the transfer (i.e. you don't know the answer to the question, or another person can better handle their request).

18. If you don't know the answer to a caller's question, don't guess -- transfer the call to the proper office, or get the caller's name and phone number, obtain the answer, and call him/her back promptly.

19. If you must place a caller on "hold," explain what you are going to do and why; then check back with him/her frequently so he/she will know you have not forgotten the call or disconnected it.

IV. FACULTY/ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

These suggestions are designed to assist faculty and administrative staff members in their roles as telephone communicators reaching into the community.

1. Be courteous on the phone. Avoid the appearance of being condescending. Remember that a phone call is an opportunity to help someone.

2. Learn how to program and de-program your phone.

3. If you leave your office for any extended periods (2 or 3 class periods; meetings; travel, etc.), program the phone to the secretary and inform that person.

4. Inform your Unit Secretary about how you want your messages handled.

5. Always return a telephone call, no matter how insignificant the matter may seem. An unreturned call is very poor public relations. Each faculty/staff member must assume responsibility for returning his/her business calls.

6. Make it a point to inform the Unit Secretary when to interrupt appointments, meetings, work, etc. to receive a phone call.

7. If you are ill or unable to meet your classes/responsibilities, phone your Unit Head and Secretary. Leave a number where you can be reached in an emergency.

8. Avoid excessive personal calls during school hours.

9. If a person you are calling is not in and someone else answers the phone, leave your name and a message ("I'll call back," "Please have Dr. X call me at 123," etc.).